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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ELAB IV](#)
SUBJECT: UNIVERSITY TEACHERS SUSPEND THEIR STRIKE,
OPTIMISTIC FINAL RESOLUTION AT HAND

REF: ABIDJAN 539

Classified By: EconChief EMassinga Reasons 1.4. (b,d)

¶1. (SBU) On May 30, the university professors and researchers from the "Coordination Nationale des Enseignants et Chercheurs" (CNEC) suspended their six-week old strike, ushering in the resumption of classes nationwide and ending the looming threat of an annulled school year (reftel). CNEC took the measure in response to a government commitment to announce within the next two months a new salary scale, to be effective from January, 2009. In the interim, as of January 2008, university professors will receive a monthly increase of USD 200 (on top of an average salary of USD 700 per month currently) and teaching hospital doctors, pharmacists and dentists will see a USD 280 monthly rise. The projected new pay scale slated for 2009 would, if enacted in full, raise salaries by between 122 and 171 percent over current levels.

¶2. (SBU) The end of the strike has helped to cool tensions in Abidjan after FESCI's violent attacks aimed at intimidating CNEC into returning to work (reftel). While neither the President's or Prime Minister's camp has said much about FESCI's unchecked, unpunished rampage (indeed, to date, no police investigation has been announced and no arrests have been made), FESCI itself was clearly pleased with the outcome, as its partisans proudly displayed their colors around town and especially in the University district throughout the week following the attacks.

¶3. (C) Emboff spoke with Alain Lobognon, newly-named Special Advisor to the Prime Minister and longtime Soro collaborator from the Forces Nouvelles, about the FESCI issue on June 4 as part of a wider discussion concerning the implementation of the Ouaga Peace Accord. Lobognon recognized that FESCI is a dangerous element that must be addressed for the peace process to move forward, and said that, long-term, the PM plans to gradually sap their strength by aggressively moving to return university students back to the reopened University of Bouake and other schools in the former Forces Nouvelles territories. By doing this, the teeming breeding grounds for FESCI at the University of Cocody (where the school population nearly doubled after the beginning of the civil conflict in 2002 as it took in many students from the University of Bouake and other institutions) will gradually lose their ability to generate the numbers of potential militants (many of whom are marginal students at best) seen today. Lobognon also said the PM refrained from publicly involving himself in the aftermath of FESCI's attacks on human rights groups LIDHO and APDH because those groups had "unwisely" chosen to associate themselves with CNEC and its cause, which he said MIDH had more prudently avoided. Lobognon reported that CNEC had come to the PM asking for help before FESCI's response, and had been told that Soro would respond to their demands, but through a low-key approach. CNEC, according to Lobognon, accepted that commitment but at the same time went ahead with a press

conference held in the LIDHO HQ, prompting the FESCI response. Because of this, Soro and his camp were none too keen to go out of their way to denounce FESCI's actions.

14. (C) Comment. The twists, turns and eventual end of this latest strike in the educational arena serves to underscore several salient aspects of the current political dynamic. One, the government continues to be pushed into wage concessions by powerful civil servants unions, concessions that will complicate efforts to bring the expenditures under control. Second, the FESCI remains a dangerous wildcard; while there is no indication the President or FPI encouraged its actions, they have not brought the group to heel after the fact. Third, the PM appears to be keeping his powder dry, waiting to pick his battles and looking to the long-term for solutions to problems not easily addressed now. End Comment.
HOOKS